

And thank you to the Erasmus University of Rotterdam for hosting these EU Strategy Days here in the University Foundation.

There is such a fantastic variety of experts, entrepreneurs, policymakers on the panels you have ahead of you today,
Not to mention some of the most esteemed minds of the academic world.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me first start by congratulating the Erasmus University Rotterdam for its 110th anniversary, or its 22nd 'Lustrum Year' as it is known in the Netherlands.

I am delighted that you have decided to spend a small but important part of that celebration here with us in Brussels.

Your university's namesake, Desiderius Erasmus, lived at a time when there was no border between Rotterdam and Brussels.

And while it has been quite some time since the 16th century, I'm glad that we have managed to break down those barriers once again, to meet here today under the shared flag of the European Union,
To celebrate education, tolerance and free thinking, as espoused by that great humanist of Rotterdam.

Your colleagues here today, and the higher education sector in general, have an essential role to play in carrying on that tradition.

And we depend on your knowledge and skills to meet the very modern challenges of today,

The social, green and digital transitions in particular.

Ladies and gentlemen, nothing sharpens the mind quite like a crisis.

Nothing makes us rush for a solution like a seemingly insurmountable challenge.
And it is safe to say we have had no shortage of challenges in recent years.

At the time of the European elections in 2019, Europe already had a lot on its plate.
The climate crisis was at the forefront of our minds.

And traumatic experiences like Brexit had shown that the future of the European project could not be taken for granted.

Today, with fresh elections around the corner, those issues have not gone away.

And they have been accompanied since by more challenges;

An unprecedented global pandemic,

And a full blown conflict in Europe.

But instead of going from one crisis to the next, we need to take stock.

We have to be able to learn from crises.

Our continent, our society, and our institutions must be able to take lessons from those challenges and use them to our advantage.

How do we do that?

How do we learn the best and worst ways to react to crises?

Ladies and gentlemen this is where you and your invaluable expertise come in.

That is why this idea of 'transformative resilience' is crucial.

The idea of adapting to and overcoming crises with new ways of thinking.
And I would like to take this chance now to speak about how that comes into play in the EU's policymaking.

Transformative resilience is central to our European strategy for universities.
And I encourage you to take every opportunity to engage with this strategy.
We want this to take transnational cooperation to a new level and to develop a European dimension in the higher education sector, built on shared values.
The strategy is a call to higher education institutions across Europe to join forces,
In order to equip students with the future-proof skills and competencies needed to match the green, digital and social transitions.

Under the European strategy for universities, we want to broaden the opportunities available under the Erasmus+ programme.
We want to introduce more blended intensive programmes that bring new and flexible formats of mobility for teachers and students alike.
We want to promote lifelong learning,
Develop entrepreneurial incubators for students eager to engage in the professional world.
And all the while, we want to boost Erasmus+ traineeships – the bedrock of student and teacher mobility and a uniquely European innovation.

Innovation is a word you will be hearing a lot of over the course of today.
But we must ensure that innovation is not just a buzzword.
And that our policies provide the best foundation for your institutions, to build innovative ways to take on the challenges of today.
Our New European Innovation Agenda aims to position Europe at the forefront of the new wave of tech innovation and start-ups.

Europe at its best is a place where the brightest talent work hand in hand with leading companies and organisations.
Where tech innovation thrives and creates breakthrough solutions.
But we cannot take Europe at its best for granted.
We need to make sure our institutions tackle the talent gaps, and the tech gaps that we face.
Many stakeholders in the community of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, or EIT, now offer deep tech training opportunities. The ambition is to train 1 million talents by 2025, and I am glad that the EIT has already received 750 000 pledges for training under the deep tech Talent initiative.
And we have put in place the EIT Higher Education Initiative, which helps foster innovation and entrepreneurship in higher education.
During that initiative's pilot phase alone, over 700 institutions benefitted from 69 million euro in supports, while more than 40,000 students and staff received training in innovation and entrepreneurship. By investing in universities and promoting collaboration between academia, industry, and government, we want to ensure Europe's position as a global leader in research and innovation.
Our universities are no strangers to this idea of transformative resilience.
The words might be relatively new, but the concept is centuries old.
The idea of building back from crises, not by returning to the days of before,

But by creating a new and better reality built on cooperation and investment in the future.

It is our role in the EU to help you invest in that future.

When it comes to preparing universities for that, the European Universities initiative is particularly central.

Alongside the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, European Universities alliances are a great example of bringing education, research, and innovation together.

By the summer, we look forward to having 500 universities involved in 60 alliances across Europe.

And I must thank Erasmus University Rotterdam for their commitment to working together on making the European Universities a reality.

Erasmus' dedication to the European University of Post-Industrial Cities alliance has helped bring the alliance from its initial pilot phase to the mainstreaming and implementation.

European Universities can count on us to remain on their side, with an investment pathway for European Universities alliances in next EU budgetary period to 2034.

The backbone of the European Strategy for Universities and the European Universities initiative is the necessity to work together across Europe.

And so, we need to break down barriers that hamper deep transnational cooperation.

On that note, I am delighted to share with you that next week, the EU will be proposing a brand new higher education package.

With it, most notably comes a key step forward in our work towards deeper education cooperation: the blueprint for a European degree.

This will mean giving more students more opportunities to study and train across the EU in a joint study programme. And at the end of their studies, those students will be awarded a unique, European degree.

This symbolises the breaking down of a major barrier to creating a truly European Education Area.

Automatic mutual recognition of qualifications and learning periods will play a key role in this.

Simply put, with a European degree, we want to include education in the pantheon of European values.

Building on the Erasmus+ programme, we want to make quality education synonymous with Europe.

Overall this new higher education package paves the way for a new kind of cooperation between higher education institutions in every one of the EU's 27 Member States.

And with an accompanying proposal on 'attractive and sustainable academic careers' we bring all the benefits of this new vision for higher education to staff and academics too.

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope this gives you a good idea of the passion we have in the EU to build your sector a foundation worthy of your historic institutions.

Thank you so much for hosting the EU Strategy Days here with us in Brussels.

And I wish you the best with the rest of the event.